

Bill Number: HB0514

Position: Unfavorable

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

I oppose this bill with deep concern and a heavy heart because it strikes at the very soul of the **First Amendment** to the United States Constitution. The First Amendment is not a minor provision that can be adjusted for convenience; it embodies the foundational principles upon which the United States was established. It safeguards our freedom to speak according to our conscience, to believe without fear, and to associate freely without government intimidation. These liberties are not privileges granted by the state—they are inherent rights that define a free people.

This bill would allow the government to condition nonprofit status in a way that pressures churches and religious organizations to censor themselves. When the state holds the power to impose fines or strip away Maryland income tax, sales tax, and property tax exemptions from churches, parsonages, and religious schools simply for speaking about candidates or elections, it is no longer neutral. It becomes coercive. It sends a chilling message: remain silent, or suffer consequences.

For people of faith, speaking truth according to Scripture is not a political strategy—it is a sacred duty. To threaten punishment for doing so is to undermine both religious liberty and freedom of speech. This bill does not merely regulate; it intimidates. It does not merely set boundaries; it attempts to silence.

As a Korean-American, this issue is deeply personal to me. In South Korea, there have been instances where pastors have faced imprisonment for expressing political views. Watching developments there has been painful. I have always been proud to live in the United States precisely because our constitutional system was designed to prevent such abuses of power. We look with concern at regimes like North Korea, where citizens are not free to speak openly. America must never move even a step in that direction.

This bill sets a dangerous precedent. It weakens the protections that have preserved liberty for generations and opens the door for future governments to punish speech they dislike. If churches can be penalized today, who will be next tomorrow?

For the sake of our Constitution, for the protection of religious liberty, and for the preservation of a truly free society, I strongly and unequivocally oppose this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

Marvin Suo

Fulton, Maryland